

CAGED
by
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From the ends of the chains hung the two cages. Those in the cages could not see from where the chains from which they hung started . . . nor could they see the walls or the limits of the emptiness of their surroundings. The cages hung in a void . . . and the cage dwellers could only see each other. There was one of each. A male and a female.

Neither knew how long they had been imprisoned, nor how they got there, nor for how long they would have to stay; yet both had memories of, if not better, then at least freer times. They felt a vague kinship towards each other. After having surveyed their dwellings thoroughly, they turned to face each other across the chasm that separated them. The male was the first to speak.

"Hello. Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

There was a pause . . . a moment of silence. Neither knew what else to say. A few minutes passed . . . and again the male spoke first.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"What's yours?"

"Kevin. My name's Kevin."

"Hi Kevin." She did not give her name.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well what?"

"What's your name?"

"Oh. My name's Annette."

Their voices echoed hollowly across the rifts that separated them as their cages swung ever so slightly . . . their inertia disrupted by their movements within.

"Hey. Annette?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know what we're doing here?" he asked. He seemed a little perplexed.

"No. I don't.

"Are you comfortable?"

"Yes. I guess so. But I'm a little lonely. How about you?"

Kevin shivered slightly as he surveyed the bleakness of his surroundings.

"I'm comfortable," he said. "But I would like to get out of here."

"Why . . . if you're comfortable?"

"Because I want to be free."

"Free? You were free once before, weren't you?"

"Yes," he answered. Vague memories were beginning to stir. Had he known her before?

"Were you comfortable then?" she asked.

"No. But I was free."

"But uncomfortable. Right?"

"Yes. But free."

Silence again reigned between the two cages. And after a few moments Annette spoke.

"Kevin?"

"Yes?"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm looking around. You know there's a door on this cage?" He didn't look at her as he spoke. He was busy searching his quarters.

"So?"

"What do you mean . . . so? So I'm going to get out of here."

Annette felt her heart start. "Where will you go?" she asked.

"I don't know. I guess I'll go back."

"But you were miserable."

"I was also happy."

"What about now? What are you now?"

"Now? Now I'm nothing."

"Well I'm staying," she said.

Kevin stopped his rummaging and looked at her in disbelief,

"I was counting on you coming with me," he said.

"Why should I?" She was defiant. "I'm comfortable here. All my needs are taken care of and there's no danger."

"But there's no excitement. Life is dull."

"Well I like it this way. I'm not going with you."

"Okay. Suit yourself." Kevin shrugged his shoulders and continued his search . . . but after a while he gave up with obvious disgust.

"Hey. Kevin?"

"What do you want?"

"What's the problem?"

"There's no metal of any kind here. How am I going to pry open the door?"

"How do you know it's locked?"

"I just assumed it was."

"Well. Why don't you try it?"

"Right," he said and pushed on the door.

"Well?"

"You were right. It's open."

"Can you see bottom?"

"No. I'm looking over the side but I don't see a thing. I wish I had a piece of rope."

"What would you do then?"

"Tie it to the side of the cage and climb down."

"And then what?"

"I don't know. It depends on what I found." His voice was vague . . . uncertain.

"What if you didn't find anything?"

"I'd have to climb back up."

"What if you couldn't?"

"I could."

"But what if you couldn't?"

"I said I could, damn it."

Again they were silent. Only now, despite their separations, Annette felt the stirrings of affections for him within her.

"Kevin."

"What now for Christ's sake?"

"I have a piece of rope."

"You do? Well why didn't you say so?" He was upset.

"I don't want you to go."

"Why not?"

"I like company."

"I thought you said you were happy."

"I am . . . as long as you're here."

"But we don't even know each other."

"I know."

Kevin looked at her and felt a softness for her growing within.

"How thick is the rope?" he asked, shaking away the feeling.

"Thick enough to hold you."

"How long is it?"

"It's quite long."

"Do you have something heavy to hang on the end of it?"

"I have a small chair."

"Listen. Annette. Tie the rope to the chair and open your door and let it hang down as low as you can. Then start swinging it like a pendulum till it reaches over here. That way I'll be able to grab it."

"No."

"No? Why the hell not?"

"I'm scared. I don't want you to go."

"It's none of your damned business if I go or not. I'll do what I want," he said angrily.

"Not without the rope you won't."

"You know what you're doing, don't you? You're trying to control me, just like it was back there."

"Well, if you didn't like it, why go back?"

"It's not the same thing and you know it."

"I'll make you a deal."

"No deals."

"No deals. No rope." She had him.

"Okay okay. What's the deal?"

"If I get the rope over to you, you use it to come over here. And then we discuss your plans together. And if we both agree, you get to try your escape."

"You've got a hell of a lot of nerve."

"Yeah. I know."

"Okay. It's a deal." He was resigned. "Now throw over the rope."

Annette tied the rope to the chair and lowered it out of her door. After a few tries, Kevin caught it and secured it to his cage. Then, swinging hand over hand, he made his way over to Annette. By the time he got there, he was sweating. She gave him a towel to dry himself.

"Nice cage you've got here," he said.

"Thank you."

"Well. Are you coming with me?"

"I thought we were going to discuss it."

"Okay. Let's discuss it."

"I don't want you to go. Stay here with me. We could be happy, taken care of, never have anything to worry about." She stood close to him.

"Don't you understand," he pleaded. "We wouldn't be free."

"Is being free so important?"

"Of course it is."

"We never really are, you know."

"That's nonsense."

"When were you ever really free? Did you ever have what you wanted? Did you ever do what you wanted to do? Or were you governed by rules and regulations over which you had no control?"

Kevin looked at her. Somehow, everything she said was true. And if it was, why indeed should he try to escape? He shook her arguments out of his head and lamely tried to keep a positive stance.

"Well I want to try anyway," he said. "At least back there I had the opportunity to try."

"Big deal. What good is it to have the opportunity if you're doomed to failure. That's not freedom. That's deception."

"Are you going to let me try?"

Sadly . . . taking one of his hands in hers . . . she agreed.

"If you absolutely insist . . . then try. You're free to try here too. Only like over there . . . you're doomed to failure."

Kevin turned and tied the rope to the side of the cage and let it hang down till it disappeared out of sight.

"Well," he said. "I'll be going now."

"Would you kiss me good bye?"

They clasped and clung to each other for a moment. Then Kevin pulled away.

"I have to go," he said softly.

"Kev."

"What?"

"If you don't see anything . . . will you come back up?"

"Sure thing."

"Be careful."

He climbed over the edge of the cage and started to make his way down the rope. As he slowly sank out of sight, only their voices kept them in touch with each other.

"Kevin."

"Yes?"

"Do you see anything yet?"

"No. Not yet."

"Can you see the end of the rope?"

"I can barely make it out. Hang on a second. I'm almost there. Okay. I'm at the end."

"Can you see anything?"

"No."

"So come back up."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to be caged."

"You were always caged." Her voice was desperate. "Your freedom was never anything but an illusion."

"I don't know. . . ."

"Please Kevin. At least we'd have each other."

Indecision was etched on his face. If he let go of the rope, he would die. If he didn't, if he went back up, he would live with Annette, caged. He had to make a decision.

"Annette."

"Yes Kevin my darling."

"Try to understand. I have to let go. I can't live caged."

A moan escaped her lips.

"I understand Kevin," she said. "I love you."

"I love you too Annette. Good bye."

"Good bye."

As Kevin let go of the rope and started to fall, the alarm clock went off in the plush urban apartment. Kevin woke up and turned it off.

Annette, his wife, stretched and yawned at the beginning of another day. She turned to him and spoke.

"Sleep well Kev?"

"Yeah. But I had this crazy dream. I dreamt I was a prisoner in a cage and couldn't escape. I wonder what it means."

"Don't worry about it dear. It doesn't mean a thing. Now you better hurry, or you'll be late for work."

He got out of bed and took one his ulcer pills and got dressed.

THE END